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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 000406

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: IEC PREDICTS KARZAI WILL SOON CALL FOR MAY 11 ELECTION

REF: A. KABUL 000397

[B. KABUL 000371](#)

[¶1.](#) (C NF) Daoud Ali Najafi, Chief Technical Officer of the Independent Election Commission (IEC), on 2/24 said he expects President Karzai soon will publicly call for a 5/11 date for the 2009 presidential election (REF A.) Najafi reports Vice-President Khalili has persuaded Karzai that the President should "divide the risk" on the question of the government's constitutional authority from 5/22, the end of the presidential term, to 8/20, the IEC's scheduled election date. By agreeing to stand for election prior to 5/22, Karzai believes he reclaims the constitutional high ground from the opposition. Najafi says the President is gambling that when he calls for a May election, the international community will respond by pressuring the opposition to agree to a Karzai-led interim government to safeguard its preference for an 8/20 date.

[¶2.](#) (C NF) Both Najafi and Zekria Barakzai, Najafi's deputy, confirmed that the IEC still held firm that 8/20 was the earliest practical date on which to hold elections. IEC Chairman Ludin has also stood firm on this point despite criticism and pressure from Karzai, the parliament, and other senior political figures. Barakzai asked whether the international community would agree to fund a May election. This, he said, is the key point of leverage. The IEC does not wish to become embroiled in this political game about the leadership of an interim government and is considering now what its public response to a Karzai announcement should be. The IEC may note that donor concerns would make funding a spring election impossible. Barakzai is worried that the brinkmanship between Karzai and the opposition over an interim arrangement will mostly end up harming the IEC's image of impartiality, eroding public confidence in the elections as free and fair.

[¶3.](#) (C NF) The two election officials agree that the opposition, not Karzai, loses politically from an earlier election. Najafi noted some sources say Karzai has promised the first vice-presidency to Marshall Fahim, and this deal is the root of the rift between Vice-President Massoud and Karzai (REF B.) As further evidence that politics, and not the constitution, is at stake, Chief Justice Azimi reportedly this week told legislative leaders that, since they now say they support the IEC's announced August date, the parliament should withdraw its letter to the Court calling for censure of the IEC for an unconstitutional act. Lower House Speaker Qanooni and other legislators declined this challenge.

[¶4.](#) (SBU) Polcouns affirmed the United States's continued solid stand on the 8/20 election date, assured Najafi and Barakzai of our full confidence in the performance of the IEC, and informed them of efforts we are making with political leaders and the international community to support a political solution to the executive authority issue. Najfi and Barakzai welcomed the information.

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